The LION'S SHARE

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"Yes," he Said, Very Quietly, "It Is Blood."

SYNOPSIS.

The story opens at Harvard where Col. Rupert Winter, U. S. A., visiting, saw the suicide of young Mercer. He met Cary Mercer, brother of the dead student. Three years later, in Chicago, in 1906, Col. Winter overheard Cary Mercer apparently planning to kidnap Archie, the colonel's ward, and to gain possession of Aunt Rebecca Winter's millions. A Miss Smith was mentioned, apparently as a conspirator. Winter unexpectedly met a relative, Mrs. Millicent Melville, who told him that his Aunt Rebecca, Archie and the latter's nurse, Miss Janet Smith, were to leave for the west with the colonel and Mrs. Melville. A great financial magnate was aboard the train on which Col. Winter met his Aunt Rebecca, Miss Smith and Archie. He set his orderly, Sergt. Haley, to watch over Cary Mercer. Col. Winter learned that the financial magnate is Edwin S. Keatcham. On approaching Cary Mercer, the colonel was snubbed. Winter, aided by Archie, cleverly frustrated a hold-up on the train. He took a great liking to Miss Smith, despite her alleged connection with the kidnaping plot, which he had not yet revealed to his relatives. The party arrived in San Francisco. It was thought that there were big persons behind the hold-up gang. Archie mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

Blind Clews.

"But this is preposterous," cried Mrs. Melville, "you must have seen him had he come out of the room; you were directly in front of the doors all the time."

"I was," admitted the colonel; "can—can the boy be hiding to scare us?" He spoke to Miss Smith. She had grown pale; he did not know that his own color had turned. Millicent stared from one to the other.

"How ridiculous!" she exclaimed; "of course not; but he must be somewhere; let me look!"

Look as they might through all the staring empty rooms, there was no vestige of the boy. He was as clean vanished as if he had fallen out of the closed and locked windows. The colonel examined them all; had there been one open, he would have peered outside, frightened as he had never been when death was at his elbow. But it certainly wasn't possible to jump through a window, and not only shut, but lock it after one.

Under every bed, in every closet, he prowled; he was searching still when Mrs. Winter returned. By this time Mrs. Melville was agitated, and, naturally, irritated as well. "I think it is unpardonable in Archie to sneak out in this fashion," she complained.

"I suppose the boy wanted to see the town a bit," observed Aunt Rebecca, placidly. "Rupert, come in and sit down; he will be back in a moment; smoke a cigar, if your nerves need calming."

Rupert felt as if he were a boy of ten, called back to common sense out of imaginary horrors of the dark.

"But, if he wanted to go out, why did he leave his hat and coat behind him?" asked Miss Smith.

"He may be only exploring the hotel," said Mrs. Winter. "Don't be so restless, Bertie; sit down."

The colonel's eye was furtively photographing every article of furniture in the room; it lingered longest on Mrs. Winter's wardrobe trunk, which was standing in her room. Randall had been dispatched for a hot-water bottle in lieu of one which had sprung a leak on the train; so the trunk stood, its door ajar.

"Maybe he is doing the Genevra stunt there—is that what you are thinking?" she jeered. "Well, go and look."

Light as her tone was, she was not unaffected by the contagion of anxiety about her; after a moment, while Rupert was looking at the wardrobe trunk, and even profanely exploring the swathed gowns held in rigid safety by bands of rubber, she moved about the rooms herself.

"There isn't room for a mouse in that box," growled the colonel.

"Of course not," said his aunt, languidly, sinking into the easiest chair; "but your mind is easier. Archie will come back for dinner; don't worry."

"How could he get by me?" retorted the colonel.

"Perhaps he went into the neighboring rooms," Miss Smith suggested. "Shall I go out and rap on the door of the next room on the left?" On the right the last room of the party was a corner room.

"Why, you might," acquiesced Aunt Rebecca; but Mrs. Melville cut the ends of her words.

"Pray let me go, Aunt Rebecca," she begged, suiting the action to the words, and was out of the door almost ahead of her sentence.

The others waited; they were silent; little flecks of color raddled Mrs. Winter's cheeks. They could hear Millicent's knock reverberating. There was no answer. "Telephone to the adjacent room," proposed the colonel.

"I'll telephone," said Mrs. Winter, and rang up the number of the next room. There was no response; but when she called the number of the room adjoining, she seemed to get an answer, for she announced her name. "Have you seen a young lad?" she continued, after an apology for disturbing them. "He belongs to our party; has he by chance got into your room? and is he there?" In a second she put down the receiver with a heightened color, saying: "They might be a little civiler in their answers, if it is Mr. Keatcham's suite."

"What did the beggar say?" bristled the colonel.

"Only that it was Mr. Keatcham's suite—Mr. E. S. Keatcham—as if that put getting into it quite out of the question. Some underling, I presume."

"There is the unoccupied room between. That is not accounted for. But it shall be. I will find out who is in there." Rupert rose as he spoke, pricked by the craving for action of a man accustomed to quick decision. He heard his aunt brusquely repelling Millicent's proposal of the police, as he left the room. Indeed, she called him back to exact a promise that he would not make Archie's disappearance public. "We want to find him," was her grim addendum; "and we can't have the police and the newspapers hindering us."

In the office he found external courtesy and a rather perfunctory sympathy, based on a suppressed, but perfectly visible conviction that the boy had stolen out for a glimpse of the city, and would be back shortly.

The manager had no objection to telling Col. Winter, whom he knew slightly, that the occupant of the next room was a New England lady of the highest respectability, Mrs. Winthrop Wigglesworth. If the young fellow didn't turn up for dinner, he should be glad to ask Mrs. Wigglesworth to let Mrs. Winter examine her room; but he rather thought they would be seeing young Winter before then—oh, his hat? They usually carried caps in their pockets; and as to coats—boys never thought of their coats.

The manager's cheeriness did not especially uplift the colonel. He warmed it over dutifully, however, for his womankind's benefit. Miss Smith had gone out; why, he was not told, and did not venture to ask. Mrs. Melville kept making cautious signals to him behind his aunt's back; otherwise she was preserving the mien of sympathetic solemnity which she was used to show at funerals and first visits of condolence and congratulation to divorced friends. Mrs. Winter, as usual, wore an inscrutable composure. She was still firmly opposed to calling in the aid of the police.

Did she object to his making a few inquiries among the hotel bellboys, the elevator boy and the people in the restaurant or in the office?

Not at all, if he would be cautious.

So he sallied out, and, in the midst of his fruitless inquisition, Millicent appeared.

Forcing a civil smile, he awaited her pleasure. "Go on, don't mind me," said she, mournfully; "you will feel better to have done everything in your power."

"But I shall not discover anything?"

"I fear not. Has it not occurred to you that he has been kidnaped?"

"Hmn!" said the colonel.

"And did you notice how perturbed Miss Smith seemed? She was quite pale; her agitation was quite noticeable."

"She is tremendously fond of Archie."

"Oh—she knows more than she will say."

"Oh, what rot!" sputtered the colonel; then he begged her pardon.

"Wait," he counseled, and his man's resistance to appearances had its effect, as masculine immobility always has, on the feminine effervescence before him. "Wait," was his word, "at least until we give the boy a chance to turn up; if he has slipped by us, he is taking a little pasear on his own account; lads do get restless sometimes if they are held too steadily in the leash, especially—if you will excuse me—by, well, by ladies."

"If he has frightened us out of our wits—well, I don't know what oughtn't to be done to him!"

"Oh, well, let us wait and hear his story," repeated the soldier.

But the last streaks of red faded out of the west; a chill fog smoked up from the darkening hills, and Archie had not come. At eight, Mrs. Winter ordered dinner to be served in their rooms. Mrs. Smith had not returned. The colonel attempted a military cheerfulness, which his aunt told him bluntly, later in the evening, reminded her of a physician's manner in critical cases where the patient's mind must be kept absolutely quiet.

But she ate more than he at dinner; although her own record was not a very good one. Millicent avowed that she was too worried to eat, but she was tempted by the strawberries and carp, and wondered were the California fowls really so poor; and gave the sample the benefit of impartial and fair examination, in the end making a very fair meal.

It is not to be supposed that Winter had been idle; before dinner he had put a guard in the hall and had seen Haley, who reported that his wife and child had gone to a kinswoman in Santa Barbara.

"Sure the woman has a fine house intirely, and she's fair crazy over the baby that's named afther her, for she's a widdy woman with never a child excipt wan that's in hivin, a little gurrl; and she wudn't let us rist 'til she'd got the cratur'. Nor I wasn't objectin', for I'm thinking there'll be something doin' and the wimin is onconvanient, thim times."

The colonel admitted that he shared Haley's opinion. He questioned the man minutely about Mercer's conduct on the train. It was absolutely commonplace. If he had any connection (as the colonel had suspected) with the bandits, he made no sign. He sent no telegrams; he wrote no letters; he made no acquaintances, smoking his solitary cigar over a newspaper. Indeed, absolutely the only matter of note (if that were one) was that he read so many newspapers—buying every different journal vended. At San Francisco he got into a cab and Haley heard him give the order: "To the St. Francis." Having his wife and child with him, the sergeant couldn't follow; but he went around to the St. Francis later, and inquired for Mr. Mercer, for whom he had a letter (as was indeed the case—the colonel having provided him with one), but no such name appeared on the register. Invited to leave the letter to await the gentleman's arrival, Haley said that he was instructed to give it to the gentleman himself; therefore, he took it away with him. He had carried it to all the other hotels or boarding places in San Francisco which he could find, aided greatly thereto by a friend of his, formerly in "the old —th," a sergeant, now stationed at the Presidio. Thanks to him, Haley could say definitely that Mercer was not at any of the hotels or more prominent boarding houses in the city, at least under his own name.

"And you haven't seen him since he got into the cab at the station?" the colonel summed up.

Haley's reply was unexpected: "Yes, sor, I seen him this day, in the morning, in this same hotel."

"Where?"

"Drinking coffee at a table in th' coort. He wint out, havin' paid the man, not a-signin' an' he guv the waiter enough to make him say 'Thank ye, sor,' but not enough to make him smile and stay round to pull aff the chair. I follied him to the dure, but he got into an autymobile—"

"Get the number?"

"Yis, sor. Number—here 'tis, sor, I wrote it down to make sure." He passed over to the colonel an old envelope on which was written a number.

*"M. 20139," read the colonel, carefully noting down the number in his own memorandum book. And he reflected: "That is a Massachusetts number—humph!"

Haley's information ended there. He heard of Archie's disappearance with his usual stolid mien, but his hands slowly clenched. The colonel continued:

"You are to find out, if you can, by scraping acquaintance with the carriage men, if that auto—you have written a description, I see, as well as the number—find out if that auto left this hotel this afternoon between six and seven o'clock. Find out who were in it. Find out where it is kept and who owns it. Get H. Birdsall, Merchants' Exchange building, to send a man to help you. Wait, I've a card ready for you to give him from me; he has sent me men before. Report by telephone as soon as you know anything. If I'm not here, speak Spanish and have them write it down. Be back here to-night by ten, if you can, yourself."

Haley dismissed, and his own appetite for dinner effectually dispelled by his report, Winter joined his aunt. Should he tell her his suspicions and their ground? Wasn't he morally obliged, now, to tell her? She was coguardian with him of the boy, who, he had no doubt, had been spirited away by Mercer and his accomplice; and hadn't she a right to any information on the matter in his possession?

Reluctantly he admitted that she did have such a right; and, he admitted further, being a man who never cheated at solitaire, that his object in keeping the talk of the two men from her had not been so much the desire to guard her nerves (which he knew perfectly well were of a robuster fiber than those of most women 20 or 40 years younger than she); no, he admitted it grimly, he had not so much spared his aunt as Janet Smith; he could not bear to direct suspicion toward her. But how could he keep silent longer? Kicking this question about in his mind, he spoiled the flavor of his after-dinner cigar, although his aunt graciously bade him smoke it in her parlor.

And still Miss Smith had not returned; really, it was only fair to her to have her present when he told his story to his aunt; no, he was not grabbing at any excuse for delay; if he could watch that girl's face while he told his story he would—well, he would have his mind settled one way or another.

Here the telephone bell rang; the manager informed Col. Winter that Mrs. Wigglesworth had returned.

"Wigglesworth? What an extraordinary name!" cried Millicent when the colonel shared his information.

"Good old New England name; I know some extremely nice Wigglesworths in Boston," Mrs. Winter amended with a touch of hauteur; and, at this moment, there came a knock at the door.

There is all the difference in the world between knocks; a knock as often as not conveys a most unintentional hint in regard to the character of the one behind the knuckles; and often, also, the mood of the knocker is reflected in the sound which he makes. Were there truth in this, one would judge that the person who knocked at this moment must be a woman for the knock was not loud, but almost timidly gentle; one might even guess that she was agitated, for the tapping was in a hurried, uneven measure.

"I believe it is Mrs. Wigglesworth herself," declared Aunt Rebecca. "Bertie, I'm going into the other room; she will talk more freely to you. She would want to spare my nerves. That is the nuisance of being old. Now open the door."

She was half-way across the threshold before she finished, and the colonel's fingers on the doorknob waited only for the closing of her door to turn to admit the lady in waiting.

A lady she was beyond doubt, and any one who had traveled would have been sure that she was a lady from Massachusetts. She wore that little close bonnet which certain elderly Boston gentlewomen can neither be driven nor allured to abandon; her rich and quiet black silken gown might have been made any year within the last five, and her furs would have graced a princess. She had beautiful gray hair and a soft complexion and wore glasses. Equally evident to the observer was the fact of her suppressed agitation.

She waved aside the colonel's proffered chair, introducing herself in a musical, almost tremulous voice with the crisp enunciation of her section of the country. "I am Mrs. Wigglesworth; I understand, Col. Winter—you?—y-yes, no, thank you, I will not sit. I—I understand Mrs. Winter—ah, your aunt, is an elderly woman."

"This is my sister-in-law, Mrs. Melville Winter," explained the colonel. "My aunt is elderly in years, but in nothing else."

The colonel, in a few words, displayed the situation. He had prevailed upon his visitor to sit down, and while he spoke he noticed that her hands held each other tightly, although she appeared perfectly composed and did not interrupt. She answered his questions directly and quietly. She had been away taking tea with a friend; she had remained to dine. Her maid had gone out earlier to spend the day and night with a sister in the city; so the room was empty between six and seven o'clock.

"The chambermaid wasn't there, then?"

"I don't think so. She usually does the room and brings the towels for the bath in the morning. But I asked her, to make sure, and she says that she was not there since morning. She seems a good girl; I think she didn't—but I have found something. At least I am af—I may have found something. I thought I might see Mrs. Winter's niece about it"—she glanced toward Millicent, who said, "Certainly," at a venture; and looked frightened.

"And you found—?" said the colonel.

"Only this. I went to my rooms, turned on the light and was taking off my gloves before I untied my bonnet. One of my rings fell on the floor. It went under a rug, and I at once remarked that it was a different place for the rug to the one where it had been before. Before, it was in front of the dresser, a very natural place, but now it is on the carpet to one side, a place where there seemed no reason for its presence. These details seem trivial, but—"

"I can see they are not," said the colonel. "Pray proceed, madam. The ring had rolled under the rug!"

Mrs. Wigglesworth gave him a grateful nod.

"Yes, it had. And when I removed the rug I saw it; but as I bent to pick it up I saw something else. In one place there was a stain, as large as the palm of my hand, a little pool of—it looks like blood."

Mrs. Melville uttered an exclamation of horror.

The colonel's face stiffened; but there was no change in his polite attention.

"May we be permitted to see this—ah, stain?" said he.

The three stepped through the corridor to the outside door, and went into the chamber. The rug was flung to one side, and there on the gray velvet nap of the carpet was an irregular, sprawling stain about which were spattered other stains, some crimson, some almost black.

Millicent recoiled, shuddering. The colonel knelt down and examined the stains. "Yes," he said, very quietly, "you are right, it is blood."

There was a tap on the door, which was opened immediately without waiting for a permission. Millicent, rigid with fright, could only stare helplessly at the erect figure, the composed, pale face and the brilliant, imperious eyes of her aunt.

"What did you say, Bertie?" said Rebecca Winter. "I think I have a right to the whole truth."

CHAPTER VI.

The Voice in the Telephone.

"Well, Bertie?" Mrs. Winter had gone back to her parlor in the most docile manner in the world. Her submission struck Rupert on the heart; it was as if she were stunned, he felt.

He was sitting opposite her, his slender, rather short figure looking shrunken in the huge, ugly upholstered easy chair; he kept an almost constrained attitude of military erectness, of which he was conscious, himself; and at which he smiled forlornly, recalling the same pose in Haley whenever the sergeant was disconcerted.

"But, first," pursued his aunt, "who was that red-headed bellboy with whom you exchanged signals in the hall?"

The colonel suppressed a whistle. "Aunt Becky, you're a wonder! Did you notice? And he simply shut the palm of his hand! Why, it's this way: I was convinced that Archie must be on the premises; he couldn't get off. So I telephoned a detective that I know here, a private agency, not the police, to send me a sure man to watch. He is made up as a bellboy (with the hotel manager's consent, of course); either I, or Millicent, or that boy has kept an eye on the Keatcham doors and the next room ever since I found Archie was gone. No one has gone out with our seeing him. If any suspicious person goes out, we have it arranged to detain him long enough for me to get a good look. I can tell you exactly who left the room."

"It is you who are the wonder, Bertie," said Aunt Rebecca, a little wearily, but smiling. "Who has gone out?"

"At seven Mr. Keatcham's secretary went down to the office and ordered dinner, very carefully. I didn't see him, but my sleuth did. He had the secretary and the valet of the Keatcham party pointed out to him; he saw them. They had one visitor, young Arnold, the Arnold's son—"

"The one who has all the orange groves and railways? Yes, I knew his father."

"That one; he only came a few moments since. Mr. Keatcham and his secretary dined together, and Keatcham's own man waited on them; but the waiter for this floor brought up the dishes. At nine the dishes were brought out and my man helped Keatcham's valet to pile them a little farther down the corridor in the hall."

These items the colonel was reading out of his little red book.

"You have put all that down. Do you think it means anything?"

"I have put everything down. One can't weed until there is a crop of information, you know."

"True," murmured Aunt Rebecca, nodding her head, thoughtfully. "Well, did anything else happen?"

"The secretary posted a lot of letters in the shute. They are all smoking now. Yes—" he was on his feet and at the door in almost a single motion. There had been just the slightest tattoo on the panel. When the door was opened the colonel could hear the rattle of the elevator. He was too late to catch it, but he could see the inmates. Three gentlemen stood in the car. One was Keatcham, the other two had their backs to Winter. One seemed to be supporting Keatcham, who looked pale. He saw the colonel and darted at him a single glance in which was something like poignant appeal; what, it was too brief for the receiver to decide, for in the space of an eye blink a shoulder of the other man intervened, and simultaneously the elevator car began to sink.

There was need to decide instantly who should follow, who stay on guard. Rupert bade the boy go down by the stairs, while, with a kind of bulldog instinct, he clung to the rooms. The lad was to fetch the manager and the keys of the Keatcham suite.

Meanwhile Rupert paced back and forth before the closed doors, whence there penetrated the rustle of packing and a murmur of voices. Presently Keatcham's valet opened the farther door. He spoke to some one inside. "Yes, sir," he said, "the porter hought to be 'ere now."

The porter was there; at least he was coming down the corridor which led to the elevator, trundling his truck before him. He entered the rooms and busied himself about the luggage.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

*Of course, no allusions are made to any real M. 20139.

Success.

"He has achieved success who has lived long, laughed often, and loved much; who has gained the trust of pure women, the respect of intelligent men, and the love of little children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who has left the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul; who has never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty nor failed to express it; who has always looked for the best in others and given the best he had; whose life was an inspiration; whose memory a benediction."—Bessie A. Stanley.

London' Feeble-Minded Children.

There are 84 schools in London for the education of children who are not included under the extreme terms "idiots or imbeciles," but are "feeble-minded and defective." They are attended by 6,000 children, of whom about two-thirds learn some useful manual work, while the rest are hopeless and require permanent custodial care.

Clear grit always commands respect; it is the quality which achieves something, and everybody admires achievement.